



National Coordinator for
Counterterrorism and Security
Ministry of Justice and Security

Mememes as an online weapon

An analysis into the use of mememes by the far right



Cover photo: Memes are an easy to use means of communication to reach young people in particular and are a subtle way of spreading far-right messages

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Summary

This analysis describes the role memes play when used by the far right. In line with the use of the term in the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland, DTN), 'far right' includes far-right activists as well as right-wing extremists and right-wing terrorists. All of these people act on the basis of a far-right ideology, which covers views such as xenophobia (including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim), a hatred of foreign (cultural) elements and ultra-nationalism. The analysis helps to recognise, understand and clarify memes by using (semi-)scientific literature, journalistic sources and interviews with experts.

Accessible means of communication to reach young people

A meme is an idea, expression or opinion captured in text or visual material, such as a photo, video or GIF file, mostly accompanied by text or sound, which is copied and distributed online. Memes are an important online means of communication for the far-right. All far-right movements use them and there are memes for every theme of the far-right discourse. Memes are an easy way to distribute far-right messages, often subtly and cloaked in humour. They enable the far-right to reach individuals, especially young people, who would otherwise be impossible to reach. Whether recipients recognise the message and do something with it is ultimately up to them and dependent on the degree to which they are receptive or resilient.

A greater insight into how memes work by recognising their functions and effects

Recognising the functions of far-right memes helps us assess whether a meme is undesirable or harmful and improves our understanding of why certain memes are spread. Far-right memes have four functions, some of which may overlap.

Entertaining far-right memes seem harmless, but the message in the meme is often anything but. The **informative** function is mainly intended for communication within the group and to alert people to new facts or publications, rather than for operational matters.

Recruiting memes contain propaganda or references to other platforms to generate interest among people, especially young people, in far-right messages and lure them towards far-right groups. Finally, there are **extremist** memes which promote and glorify extremist acts.

It is difficult to attach a direct effect to a single meme or to the use of memes by the far right. However, far-right memes do contribute to three indirect and gradual effects. These effects, namely the **normalisation and social acceptance of far-right ideas, group and identity formation and inspiration for extremist action**, can in turn lead to undesirable developments in society and undermine the democratic legal order or national security.

Despite moderation, far-right memes are universally present on the internet

These days far-right memes can be found all over the internet. Memes which originate in the far-right online subculture are spread to various social media platforms. The more content is moderated on a platform, the more subtly the far-right message has to be packaged in the meme. Only then can a meme with a far-right message reach the larger platforms, bypass moderation and ultimately appeal to a wider audience. Conversely, explicit messages and violent memes regularly appear in closed far-right online groups where there is no moderation.

Knowledge of and resilience to unwanted developments via memes

Put briefly, memes are an 'online communication weapon' of the far right that can be used in a variety of ways and have various functions. The ambiguity and humour used in far-right memes make them almost impossible to tackle by means of criminal law or online content management and the intentions and specific direct effects are difficult to demonstrate. However, it is clear that the use of memes by the far right is contributing to the normalisation of far-right thinking, (online) group and identity formation and, in a few instances, serves as possible inspiration for violence or other extremist action. These are undesirable developments that may undermine the functioning of the democratic legal order and national security. It is essential to recognise far-right memes as such, to understand and clarify their effect and to make society more resilient to them.

Introduction

The internet has been a major influence on various far-right developments in recent years. The definition used in the analysis aligns with the definition of the far right used by National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (*Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismedebestrijding en Veiligheid, NCTV*) which is centred on far-right ideology. Far-right ideology covers such views as xenophobia (including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim), a hatred of foreign (cultural) elements and ultra-nationalism. While far-right activists abide by the frameworks of the democratic legal order, right-wing extremists try to undermine it and right-wing terrorists commit violence against people based on far-right views.¹

Far-right propaganda, knowledge transfer, recruitment, radicalisation, financing, incitement to action and networking are increasingly happening on social media and other online meeting places.¹ The use of images and symbols has always played a prominent role in far-right circles and naturally they are also used on the internet. Far-right ideas and opinions are expressed online in so-called memes and then further disseminated in an easy to access way.

A meme is an idea, expression or opinion captured in text or visual material, such as a photo, video or GIF file, mostly accompanied by text or sound, which is copied and distributed online.

This analysis answers the question of what role memes play in the Netherlands in terms of the far right. The analysis involved examining what memes are, how they are disseminated and their forms, functions and effects. Up to now only limited research has been performed on the role of memes in far-right circles and this analysis fills that gap. The aim of this analysis is to provide a better insight into the online functioning of far-right groups and individuals by focusing on a crucial sub-aspect, so that the dangers and security risks to society can be more easily identified.

The focus of this analysis is on the use of far-right memes in general and, wherever possible, specifically for the Netherlands as well. The analysis does not, therefore, cover other radical and extremist memes. Anyone wishing to find out more about those memes should refer to the literature published on the subject.² This analysis is based on scientific literature, journalistic publications and interviews with experts and not on any independent research on the internet, nor on any investigation into individuals and organisations. The memes shown and described in the analysis are intended purely for illustrative purposes and should not be interpreted as meaning that the NCTV supports the content or wants to provide a platform for further dissemination.

Reading guide

The above section on the summary and the introduction are followed by the first chapter which explains what memes are and how they are used in society. The second chapter examines the emergence of the far-right meme culture and the online dissemination of far-right memes. Chapter 3 examines meme use by the various far-right movements and chapter 4 looks at the main themes used in far-right memes. Chapters 5 and 6 explain the functions and effects of far-right memes and they are followed by the conclusion.

An overview of the definitions of some key terms in this analysis, such as 'far right', 'right-wing extremism' and 'radicalisation', can be found in Annex 1. Annex 2 contains an overview of the various types of online platforms and web pages on which far-right, right-wing extremist and right-wing terrorist groups and individuals operate. This overview is intended to help readers gain a better understanding of the types of platforms mentioned in this publication and to make it easier to read. Annex 3 describes the main far-right extremist movements in the Netherlands and Annex 4 the specific characteristics of memes for each of those movements. Finally, this analysis uses explanatory footnotes - at the bottom of the page - and endnotes with references - at the end.

¹ See Annex 1 for definitions of key terms.

1. Memes as a popular online means of communication

This chapter focuses on the origins, functioning and characteristics of internet memes, as well as their use in society and by radical and extremist groups.

Internet meme derived from cultural phenomenon which spreads in an evolutionary way

'Meme' is a newly formed word derived from the Greek word *mimesis* (representation, imitation) and the English word 'gene'. In 1976, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins introduced the term in his book *'The Selfish Gene'*³ to describe a cultural phenomenon that, like a human gene, is spread, maintained and sometimes mutates through replication.

According to Dawkins a meme is, in fact, an element of culture that spreads according to Darwin's laws of evolution.⁴ The memes discussed in this analysis are specifically the 'internet memes' which are used as online means of communication. In effect, internet memes have been around since the internet became available to a wider audience.⁵

An internet meme - referred to below simply as meme - is an idea, expression or opinion captured in text or visual material, such as a photo, video or GIF file^{II}, mostly accompanied by text or sound, which is copied and distributed online. Although memes often contain sarcastic, ironic, or sometimes offensive humour, that does not have to be the case. Memes are spread, become popular and retain their popularity on websites, on social media and in phone apps. The power of successful memes is based on the fact that they go 'viral' and can reach a (very) large number of people within a short space of time.

The format of a meme can be edited by various internet users to create ever more new manifestations. Memes can be edited by, for example, photoshopping an image or repeatedly adding different texts or sound. Certain characters, hashtags, slogans, terms and terminology used within a group on the internet can also be regarded as memes. A meme can remain popular and in

use for a long time, but usually people will eventually stop using it and forget about it. It is then referred to as a 'dead meme' or 'old meme'. Sometimes an old meme will still be used by a small group of people, even if it is no longer in use by a wide audience. Some memes are rediscovered after a period of being 'dead' and become popular again.

Memes sometimes contain multiple messages for different recipients

The majority of memes are intended to be innocent and humorous. However, memes can also have a different meaning in a given context. They can, for example, be ideological in nature and criticise social phenomena or developments. The creator can then spread a meme to deliver a particular message.

A meme can be a *dog whistle* in a subculture that is not accessible or understandable to everyone. The purpose of a *dog whistle* is to convey two different messages to two groups of recipients, using a single term such as a word, sentence, image, or gesture. A dogwhistle meme therefore serves different types of audiences. The first message is the mostly neutral or socially accepted message which is addressed to the largest group of listeners.

The second message in the same meme is encoded and sometimes contains intentions which are not socially acceptable. This coded message is only picked up and understood by a smaller group of listeners, for example within a particular subculture.⁶

II GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) is a file format that supports both static and moving images. These silent mini-videos play infinitely in a so-called loop.

Memes are easy and popular to use

Internet users assign meaning to memes and use them in all kinds of situations. This is usually done anonymously, so that the origin of a meme is difficult to trace. Memes are mainly developed for, and used by, children and young adults, although their popularity has now spread to older generations as well. They are shared on social media and in chat groups of friends and schools, usually as a joke and without any deeper meaning or intent. And if there is a deeper meaning, the user is not always aware of it. Memes are popular because it is fairly easy for people to make their own ones. Various sites, mobile apps and artificial intelligence (AI) can help in this regard and that makes them more accessible to people.⁷ The huge increase in the use and the popularity of memes during the past decade has turned them into an interesting means of communication for marketing companies, political parties and other civil society organisations that can all use memes to spread and publicise their message to as many people as possible.⁸

Memes also used by radical and extremist groups and individuals

Given the huge popularity of memes, it is no surprise that radical and extremist groups and individuals are also using them in their online activities. Right-wing and left-wing extremists, as well as jihadists, use memes in their online communications.⁹ Memes sometimes allow them to spread their message, opinions, propaganda and ideologies explicitly, but more often subtly and with a touch of irony or sarcasm.¹⁰ Incidentally, academics and journalists commonly consider the use of memes by the far left to be less effective because the nature of memes is said to clash with so-called far-left norms and values. This is because many memes only become popular when they go too far or are shocking or cruel, and these are qualities which are usually seen as unethical and unacceptable within far-left circles.¹¹ The far right therefore makes fun of this in their memes (*'the left can't meme'*).¹² Nevertheless, there are still popular far-left memes in circulation, including in the Netherlands. Extremist groups are also known to occasionally hijack memes or formats from each other. For example, images or figures which regularly feature in far-right memes have been reused by jihadists who have added their own message.¹³

2. The spread of far-right memes

This chapter focuses on the emergence of far-right meme culture and the spread of far-right memes on the internet and the role and influence of content moderation. It also briefly discusses the use of international and more national and culture-specific far-right memes.

Far-right meme culture originated in US and then came to Europe

In recent years a far-right meme culture has emerged, which originated mainly from the alt-right movement^{III} in the US and which was later adopted in Europe. Gamergate, an online hate campaign in 2014 against the perceived feminisation and 'political correctness' of the gaming industry, played an important role in this context. Mainly male gamers felt that gaming had to continue to be an exclusive domain of – preferably white and heterosexual – men. Progressive female game developers and journalists who wrote positive reviews of their games and labelled the rest of the game industry as sexist received serious threats, were doxed^{IV} and had to go into hiding. Gamergate, often referred to using a hashtag (#Gamergate), led to fierce discussions on social media about political correctness in games, media and online communities.¹⁴

The online discussions around Gamergate also featured a wide range of opinions and ideas from various subcultures, including far-right groups who could identify with the fight against political correctness and feminisation. As a result, gamers and the associated meme culture came into repeated contact with far-right ideas and were influenced by them. Various online platforms on which Gamergate played out, such as 4chan and certain gaming forums, became more radical in terms of content. People who did not support Gamergate started turning away from these sites. Those who stayed supported the extremist language and images and added material to the sites.

They became more radical in their communication and received support for their views from other users on these platforms. Several individuals who were active on these Gamergate-related online platforms were also involved in the emergence of the alt-right movement on the internet shortly afterwards.¹⁵

It was quite easy to disseminate far-right messages via these platforms due to the lack of opposition from others, as well as the lack of control and moderation of content. Game culture memes were basically hijacked by the far right. More and more far-right memes also reached the larger social media platforms via specific meme forums. The alt-right online culture was a key source and precursor of the meme culture which received a boost during Donald Trump's 2016 US presidential election campaign. With a sometimes aggressive online campaign which, in terms of tactics and style, partly had its origins in Gamergate and was actively supported by alt-right, it ensured that more and more far-right memes reached mainstream audiences, not only in the US but also in Europe and the Netherlands.¹⁶

Far-right memes present all over the internet

Far-right memes are spread via various types of internet platforms, including those outside the more well-known far-right channels.¹⁷ These range from websites set up especially for memes to alternative social media less known to the general public. Explicitly extremist memes are usually spread only in private and encrypted chat groups and via game forums,

III See Annex 1 for an explanation of alt-right.

IV Doxing is a tool regularly used by (e.g. far-left or far-right) activists. It means the collection and online publication of personal and private data, often with the intention of 'exposing', damaging or intimidating a person or organisation. Doxing was made a criminal offence in the Netherlands on 1 January 2024. See: OM.nl, 'Doxing a criminal offence as from 1 January 2024' (Doxing vanaf 1 January 2024 strafbaar), 19 December 2023.

reaching only a limited group.¹⁸ Veiled and non-violent far-right memes are also spread on the larger public social media platforms.¹⁹ In the case of teenagers, for example, popular video apps are platforms on which they may be confronted with far-right memes for the first time, sometimes via an algorithm.²⁰ Consequently, a mix of 'humorous' memes that contain far-right messages, disinformation and conspiracies is emerging in more and more online meeting places.²¹ This wider dissemination means that 'humorous' memes with a far-right content have a wider reach and are picked up by a wider audience, which does not always recognise the underlying message. This means that some people are unintentionally contributing to the further dissemination and normalisation of a radical way of thinking when they think they are forwarding a 'funny picture'.²²

Far-right memes regularly bypass content moderation

Although content managers of the platforms of 'big tech' companies like Google and Meta carry out stringent checks for the presence of extremist content, not all subtle far-right expressions are recognised.²³ Most far-right memes can be regarded as borderline content.²⁴ In other words, content that is not clearly extremist or breaks the rules, but is seen as undesirable by many users. Some people who disseminate far-right memes seek refuge on alternative platforms that do allow far-right messages, including the more explicit or outright extremist ones, under the guise of freedom of expression. This is all part of the revenue model of those platforms because hateful, sexist and far-right content supposedly generates 'engagement' and therefore profit for those platforms.²⁵ Something else to bear in mind is that content in several private forums and chats is not moderated at all by the administrators or owners. Thousands of chats are started each and every day in certain games and that makes it difficult to keep track of them. What is more, a lot of content quickly disappears from certain platforms because the turnover rate there is high. In some cases however, the content can still be found in some private chats and groups, or stored locally, so it is not completely lost.²⁶

With the purpose of influencing public online discussions and recruiting new followers, right-wing extremists are also active outside the echo chambers^V of their own online platforms.

In this case more veiled and 'humorous' memes are more suitable, for security reasons and in order to avoid content management measures, than direct calls for hatred and violence. Such memes do not contain extremist logos or slogans and that makes them easy to distribute on mainstream online platforms where they reach a larger audience.²⁷ By using memes on the major mainstream platforms 'interested parties' can be enticed to join alternative or private platforms.²⁸ For example by sharing a web link with a meme or in the comments under a post that allows you to access it.²⁹ Similarly, a far-right account may first share amusing memes on mainstream platforms so that individuals start liking or following that account because of the humour. Eventually, however, new followers will come into contact with far-right memes via accounts like this, possibly on an other online platform.³⁰ Non-extremist online subcultures and popular online influencers can therefore provide people with access to far-right thinking or right-wing extremist online communities.³¹

Memes in circulation internationally and on a country-specific and culture-specific basis

Many (templates for) far-right memes are used internationally and have the same meaning in most countries. They mostly stem from the US or UK. There are also certain German-language neo-Nazi memes that are popular internationally. Memes used internationally may cause far-right themes that originate elsewhere to become popular in the Netherlands as well. In some cases extra, specific national symbols or texts may be added to the 'international' (templates of) memes to make them more usable in a particular country. This makes it possible to capitalise on a particular political or social current event in a country, thereby making the original meme more useful or better understood in the country in question without substantially changing its original meaning.³²

Other far-right memes are more country-specific and culture-specific and they are therefore harder to use in countries other than their country of origin. Such memes are then mainly for use within a particular group, or for national purposes. A far-right meme based on the same template can also have different meanings in different countries. Editing those memes and the texts that accompany them can create a different meaning in the historical and cultural context of one country compared to a neighbouring country.³³

V An echo chamber refers to the principle that your own ideas are confirmed when you only surround yourself with people who think the same way as you do.

Example of an internationally used template for far-right memes (featuring Pepe the Frog) which have the same meaning but which are tailored to the individual countries: keeping foreigners outside the country's own borders using a fence in the US, the UK and Hungary. (Source: Knowyourmeme.com and gGAG.com)



Memes with far-right messages are also being made in the Netherlands by far-right online groups and communities. Many of today's far-right memes in the Netherlands still find their origins in the alt-right, as well as in the other far-right movements. The very violent memes originate mainly from online networks with right-wing terrorist content and are mainly shared within those networks.³⁴ Some far-right memes in the Netherlands also have their origin more in Dutch culture. As a result, slogans with national symbols initially used elsewhere in society are regularly picked up by the far right and repopularised for far-right purposes. One example is the advertising slogan 'kaas is de baas' ('cheese is the boss'), which was introduced by the Dutch dairy industry and which is now used in memes as code language against perceived external threats (e.g. 'Islam', 'asylum seekers').³⁵

3. Meme use by far-right movements

The far-right landscape in the Netherlands is fragmented into different groups and ideologies. In general, it can be divided into the ideological movements of accelerationism, alt-right, neo-Nazism, the Identitarian movement and ethnonationalism. A more detailed explanation of the movements can be found in Annex 3. This chapter describes the specific elements that characterise memes in far-right movements so that they can be recognised as such. The memes used are for illustrative purposes.

3.1 Accelerationism

Fascination with guns and violence

Among accelerationists and other right-wing terrorists, like some neo-Nazis, there is a fascination with (3D printed) weapons and violence. This is also reflected in the memes shared within these circles in private online communities which feature images of weapons and texts calling for (people to prepare for) violence and self-defence. Examples include memes calling for accelerationists to use armed drones to attack vital infrastructure such as electricity grids.³⁶



Meme, shared in two parts within accelerationist groups, calling for an armed drone attack on an electricity grid. (Source: TRAC, *Weekly Analyst Review*, 22 February 2023)

Explicit message and the use of the colours black, white and red

Hate speech and violent texts regularly appear in accelerationist memes, as does the inverted swastika. This swastika is said to represent chaos and evil, and that fits with their ideology that chaos is needed first in order to then create a new 'natural' order. Another conspicuous characteristic of accelerationist memes is the frequent use of Nazi symbols and skulls for faces.³⁷

Accelerationists use humour a lot less or in a different way (i.e. in a more violent and morbid way) to other right-wing extremist movements. Because they operate in closed online groups, they do not have to be as subtle and can express their views more directly. One example of this is their dissemination of explicit memes to promote a race war. An 'humorous' meme is less useful in that context. Dutch accelerationists also share explicit memes with extremist and terrorist content. In terms of colour use, it is notable that accelerationist memes are predominantly black, red and white, similar to some memes used by classic neo-Nazis.³⁸

Examples of accelerationist memes which clearly feature red, white and black colouring, the use of Nazi (SS) signs and a skull. (Source: isdglobal.org/explainers/accelerationism and [ADL.org](https://adl.org))



Glorifying perpetrators and accelerationist publications

Right-wing terrorists such as accelerationists regularly glorify successful perpetrators of far-right terror attacks in their memes who they see as 'saints', exemplars and sources of inspiration. 'Holy' perpetrators of attacks like those in Norway (2011), Christchurch (2019), Buffalo (2022) and Bratislava (2022), and the dates on which these attacks took place, regularly appear in accelerationist memes, as do elements from some livestreams of the attacks, such as the texts written on the weapon used by the Christchurch attacker.³⁹

Passages from the manifestos of the perpetrators of these attacks and important ideological literature for accelerationists such as 'Siege', 'The Hard Reset' and other publications by the accelerationist 'Terrorgram' online network also find their way into memes.⁴⁰ For example, the pleas in the Christchurch attacker's manifesto for more memes to be made have, in turn, been used in new memes. The Christchurch gunman himself used the well-known 'Navy Seal Copypasta' textual meme in his manifesto, which was subsequently widely shared by accelerationists.⁴⁰ Other elements referred to by right-wing perpetrators of terrorist attacks in their manifestos, such as ecofascism,⁴¹ are also used in some accelerationist memes. The 'ReadSiege' meme and hashtag was popular on accelerationist social media channels in 2017.⁴¹

VI Terrorgram (corruption of Terror and Telegram) is a network collective of accelerationist Telegram channels that promotes right-wing extremist and terrorist literature and videos.

VII Ecofascists claim that harmony between white people and nature has been lost due to mass immigration, globalisation and capitalism, among other things, and that the only solution is to stop immigration or exterminate non-white populations.

Examples of accelerationist memes inspired by violence and right-wing terrorist attacks. The middle one also shows the influence of the alt-right ('Chad', see section on alt-right). (Source: Knowyourmeme.com and gGAG.com):



3.2 Alt-right

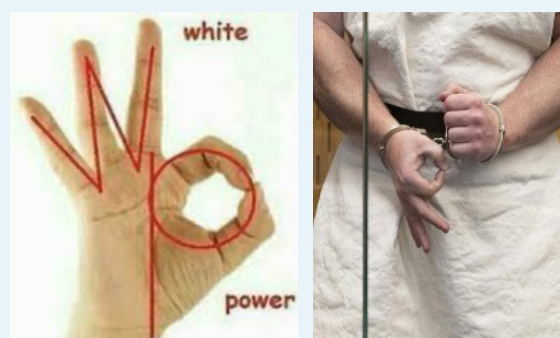
Veiled messages and emphasis on traditionalism, purity, masculinity

The online dissemination of racist memes is a popular practice among the alt-right. These memes are usually packaged in a 'humorous way' to conceal the message. In addition, the focus of memes is often on themes of purity, cleanliness and traditions, which symbolise the actual alt-right themes of misogyny (hatred of women), hatred of the LGBTIQ+ community, opposition to progressive and 'leftist' ideals, white male supremacy, anti-Semitism and an emphasis on conservative Christian values. Images of so-called 'traditional wives' and the use of the hashtag #tradwife in memes represent a traditional existence where women do the housework and mainly stay at home to take care of a family which includes lots of children. This symbolizes the traditional gender roles that the alt-right consider would be best for men, women and society and a rejection of many aspects of modernity. Having a large number of white children ensures the perpetuation of the white race. Well-known figures in these alt-right memes are Chad and Stacy, as a portrayal of the handsome, attractive and successful husband and wife. GigaChad (a photoshopped Russian model) symbolises the ideal image of masculinity. Chad and Stacy are also well-known figures within the so-called involuntary celibate or incel subculture^{VIII} which, in terms of its themes and online use of language and memes, has some similarities, with the alt-right and neo-Nazism.⁴²

Attractive women are used by the alt-right as a propaganda tool to attract young white men.

The emphasis on the cleanliness and purity of life and self-realisation are reflected in memes which reject drugs, alcohol and porn and encourage physical exercise. Other memes revolve around the themes of fitness, sports and martial arts training, with the intention being to encourage masculinity and ensure that the 'white boys' are prepared for a race war. The regular references in alt-right memes to ancient Norse cultures, Germanic heroes and clean, pure blue skies, waters and forests serve to emphasise purity and cleanliness⁴³ in terms of 'keeping races pure' and the perceived superiority of white people over other races. A 'dog whistle' that regularly pops up in alt-right memes (as well as in other far-right movements) should also be seen in this light: the 'OK' sign, or white power sign, made with your hand by outstretching your little finger, ring and middle finger to represent the 'W', while your index finger and thumb form the circle of the 'P'.⁴⁴

'OK' or 'White Power' sign. On the right is an image of the Christchurch terrorist attacker in court, which inspired all kinds of memes. (Source: ADL.org)



VIII See Annex 3 for an explanation of this subculture which is not classified as being far right.

Use of hijacked cartoon characters and other animations

Alt-right memes regularly hijack and use images of cartoon characters. The best known is 'Pepe the Frog', an anthropomorphic frog character with no political-ideological ulterior motives from the *Boy's Club comic series* (2005). Pepe became a meme as his popularity grew steadily in social online networks since 2008. In 2015 it was one of the most popular meme characters used on various platforms. The use of memes featuring Pepe the Frog by well-known far-right politicians and artists contributed to Pepe's popularity as a meme and made this frog a symbol of the alt-right movement. The Anti-Defamation League^{IX} included Pepe in its database of hate symbols in 2016, but also reported that most copies of Pepe were not used in a hate-related context. The fact is that several variations on the Pepe meme have gone viral within the alt-right movement. The same can be said of 'Kekistan', which is Pepe's country and which has a flag inspired by Nazi Germany.⁴⁵

Another well-known animated figure in alt-right memes is the clown. *Clownworld* is the belief that the world has gone mad and that 'normal behaviour' is overshadowed by all sorts of 'politically correct' ideas. Supporters of this idea argue that resisting this madness is futile and it is therefore better to be cynical and nihilistic. Those who take the *clown pill* are resigned to seeing the world as a 'joke' in which the downfall of white society in a multiracial country is played out.⁴⁶ Clown icons and emojis are also regularly used on social media in posts and profiles.⁴⁷ All kinds of edited images of US former president Donald Trump are also a popular figure in alt-right memes because he is seen as one of them. He is regularly depicted as Pepe or Clown.⁴⁸



Example of Pepe and Kekistan (Source: Knowyourmeme.com)

IX A Jewish international non-governmental organisation based in the US that aims to combat anti-Semitism and intolerance.

3.3 Neo-Nazism

References to World War II, racism and anti-Semitism

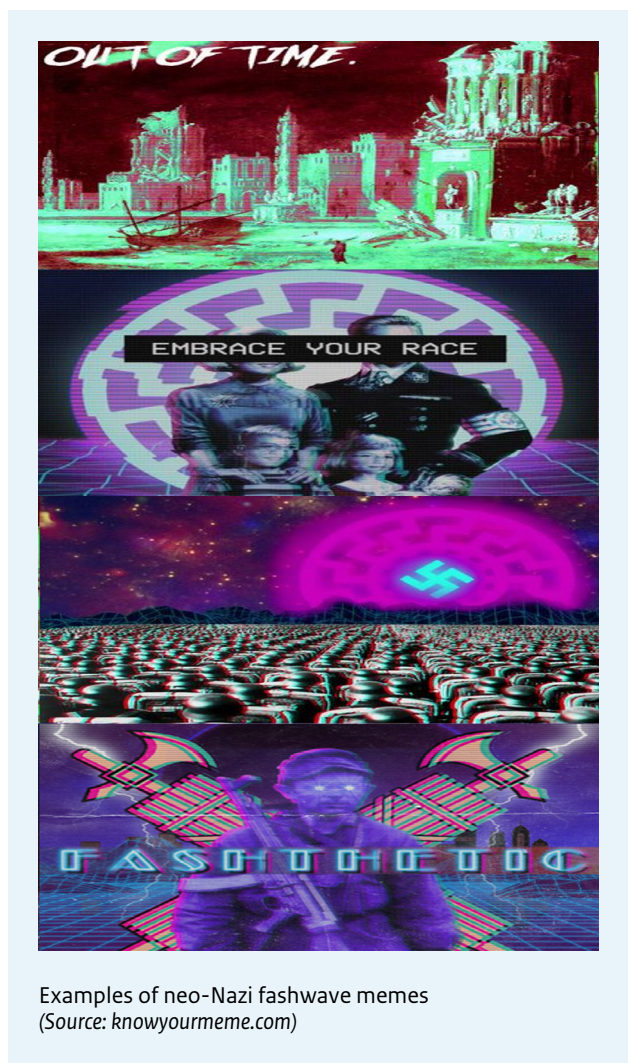
Neo-Nazis often include references to World War II in their memes. Recurring themes include anti-Semitism, anti-communism, racism and Social Darwinism.⁴⁹ The existence of the Holocaust is regularly denied or downplayed, and inimical thinking also features strongly. Another theme in neo-Nazi memes is a yearning for a strong leader. Images of well-known far-right former dictators such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini feature regularly, as do references to 'Mein Kampf'. Certain number combinations which refer to important dates or letters in the alphabet which represent certain significant initials are also used. For instance, the number 18 refers to the letters A and H, which in turn stand for Adolf Hitler. Assumed racial differences and racial purity also feature in neo-Nazi memes. US neo-Nazi memes in particular portray black people as the 'enemy', while in Europe and the Netherlands the more likely targets are Muslims or other non-Western immigrants.⁵⁰

The use of the colours of red, white and black, fashwave and symbolism

The colours used in the memes are often those of Nazism, in other words red, black and white. Another characteristic of this movement is the use of a particular style and aesthetic, such as fashwave.⁵¹ Fashwave is adopted from a style called synthwave and uses colours like cyan, pink, blue and purple and a design that is reminiscent of pop culture from the 1980s and 1990s. Neo-Nazi memes also regularly include the swastika, the 'Sonnenrad' (sunwheel), runic characters (Germanic scripts) and Greek and Roman sculptures with far-right slogans.⁵²

New push for racism and anti-Semitism by 'White Lives Matter'

Supposed racial differences have become more visible in memes since the rise of the White Lives Matter (WLM) movement. The alleged threat to the white race by immigration from non-Western countries is also a regular theme. The use of images of a glass of milk, the code language 'drink milk' or the borrowed slogan 'milk the white engine' (*melk de witte motor*) are examples of memes used to demonstrate the superiority of white western genes. Users of these memes assume that white people are less likely to be lactose-intolerant than people of other skin colours. WLM memes also include texts such as 'race-mixing is white genocide' and 'put your own people first'.⁵³ Anti-Semitism and the Great Replacement theory are also popular WLM meme themes. Various incidents during which lasers were used to project racist and anti-Semitic texts onto objects in the Netherlands, for example onto the Erasmus Bridge and the Anne Frank House, led to memes being shared on a number of different online platforms about these projections.⁵⁴



3.4 Identitarian movement

Preservation of your own culture, anti-Islam and the use of slogans and logos

The memes of the far-right identitarian movement are mainly aimed at preserving one's own identity and playing on the fear of Islam and migrants among certain sections of the population. Anti-migration and anti-Muslim are therefore popular themes in this movement's memes. Identitarian groups from various European countries regularly seek to cooperate, for example in the context of the 2017 'Defend Europe' initiative, which was aimed at stopping the flow of refugees across the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, the 'Defend Europe' slogan regularly features in memes of the Dutch identitarian movement, as does the well-known slogan and hashtag '#kominverzet' ('let's resist'). The message of both slogans is to take action against immigration. Identitarian memes are also about preserving your own culture, for example in the form of 'Black Pete' (Zwarte Piet), who is Saint Nicholas' companion in Dutch folklore.⁵⁵ Identitarians also use their characteristic yellow and black colours and logos in their memes. See Annex 3 for the difference in the logos used.



Meme from the European identitarian anti-immigration 'Defend Europe' initiative, plus the yellow and black omega and lambda logos of the Dutch identitarian movement and of the identitarian movement in other European countries respectively.
(Source: Hopenothate.org.uk and Wikipedia)

3.5 Ethnonationalism

The Greater Netherlands concept, idealisation of 'glory days' and use of the orange flag and colour

The memes used by Dutch ethnonationalists and the 'Dutch movement' (*Dietse Beweging*) are based primarily on the theme of a 'Greater Netherlands' and the protection of one's own culture. The concept of a 'Greater Netherlands' refers to the Netherlands, Flanders and French Flanders. Some supporters of the movement also include the former Transvaal province in South Africa which was founded by Dutch farmers. The associated memes regularly feature (historical) maps of a 'Greater Netherlands'. The 'rich history' and 'glory days' of the Netherlands are also popular themes in memes by these groups, which include references to the Golden Age, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and historical figures such as Michiel de Ruyter. Memes also advocate preserving 'traditions' like 'Black Pete'. Orange is a commonly used colour in memes within nationalist circles.⁵⁶ The Prince's flag, or the use of colours derived from it, also feature regularly in the memes created by these groups and individuals. The so-called 'Geuzen flag' is also used by these nationalists and followers of the 'Dutch Movement'. Dutch far-right nationalists also regard that flag as a battle flag.⁵⁷



Je pupil kan wel
45% groter worden als
je iets ziet waar je van houdt

The Geuzen flag and the Greater Netherlands as a theme in a meme, with the use of the colour orange being typical of ethnonationalists and followers of the 'Dutch Movement'.
(Source: Wikipedia and ggag.com).

Memes have specific characteristics for each far-right movement

To understand far-right memes and how they are used within a movement, it is important to recognise certain characteristics of memes. Although there are similarities, there are also some striking differences for each far-right movement in terms of meme characteristics and usage. These include the kind of figures and characters used, the use of style and colour in memes, specific subject choices, the kind of humour and the degree of subtlety of the message. A combination of these types of characteristics means it is usually possible to identify from which movement a meme originates. The type of humour used, and whether or not a message is subtle or explicit, are related to issues such as security awareness, the closed nature of a group, visibility to the outside world and the degree of content moderation. Explicit and right-wing extremist messages and more confrontational jokes occur more in closed online groups than on public major social media platforms, where subtlety and irony are more effective. Annex 4 contains an overview of the main characteristics of memes per far-right movement, which may help identify the memes.

One thing to note in this context is that individuals and groups do not need to adhere to the frameworks of a single ideological movement and can use memes and specific features from the various trends and movements to get their message across. In those instances they pick elements they want to use from various ideologies and movements and, in that way, compile their own justification that aligns with their own views. Individuals and groups that cannot be classified as far-right may also use originally far-right memes to make a point because they agree with the specific message of such memes. This overlap and wider reach makes it more difficult to assign a meme with a far-right message to a specific movement.

4. Key themes in far-right memes

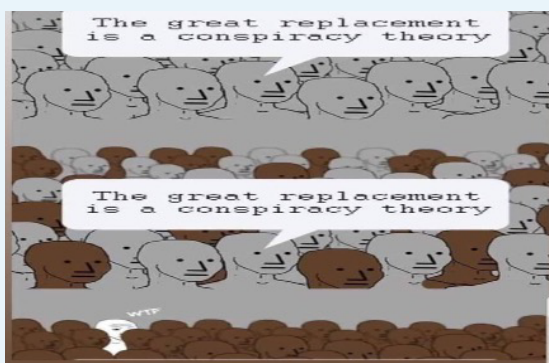
This chapter elaborates on the main themes that feature in far-right memes, which are: 1) the Great Replacement theory; 2) anti-Semitism; 3) Islam and immigration; 4) an aversion to government and democracy; 5) the fight against the far left, feminism, LGBTIQ+ and woke; and 6) racial doctrine, eugenics and perceived white superiority. In doing so, examples of memes will be described and/or shown by way of an illustration.

4.1 Great Replacement theory: planned replacement of white population via immigration

The far-right conspiracy theory of the 'Great Replacement' (also referred to as 'White Genocide') describes how a Jewish or left-wing elite in Western countries is planning to change the population composition by replacing the original inhabitants through immigration and interracial marriages. The idea is that the original white population in the West would slowly disappear and a weaker race would emerge, making it easier for the elite to maintain or strengthen their influence.⁵⁸ The emphasis in the conspiracy theory is very much on the allegedly planned approach adopted by the actors involved. While there is no evidence for this planned approach, it is a fact that the demographic composition of western countries in recent decades has undeniably changed⁵⁹ and supporters of this theory attempt to frame that change in such a way that it seems plausible for it to be based on a plan.

In recent years the Great Replacement theory played a prominent role in legitimising right-wing terrorist attacks in Christchurch (2019),⁶⁰ El Paso (2019) and Buffalo (2022), the assassination of German politician Walter Lübke in 2019, as well as in the 2011 attacks in Oslo and on Utøya. Several attackers also used memes which contained references to the theory in their manifestos and in other online communications. Other people then helped to disseminate them more widely. Slogans which regularly recur in memes and which are related to this theory are 'You will not replace us!' and the variant 'Jews will not replace us!'.⁶¹

Memes influenced by ideas on the Great Replacement depict, for example, images of (supposedly) leftist or Jewish politicians who support migration into Western Europe, accompanied by other images of large groups of non-Western men and texts such as 'we can do this' (*wir schaffen das*) or 'nothing to see here, keep going' (*niks aan de hand, doorlopen*). Such memes play on the concerns of some people about their own safety and that of women and children, or the fear of displacement or disadvantage in terms of, for example, the labour and housing market ('how long have you been waiting for a home?' (*hoe lang wacht u al op een woning?*)). Some memes focus on advertisements featuring couples of mixed descent, the abolition of certain traditions like 'Black Pete' or the alleged adaptation of Christian holidays due to the influence of Islam (replacing the word Easter with the words 'Spring Festival'). Memes influenced by the Great Replacement theory appear in almost all far-right movements and are often mixed with other themes, such as anti-migration and anti-Islam, anti-Semitism, racial discrimination and anti-government.⁶²



Examples of memes influenced by the Great Replacement theory. (Source: Knowyourmeme.com, gGAG.com)

4.2 Anti-Semitism: Hatred of Jews and Holocaust denial

Far-right memes often feature anti-Semitism or a hatred of Jews, by depictions of conspiracies relating to a Jewish elite allegedly pulling the strings of world politics and economy. Such anti-Semitic memes use specific characteristics that are said to be attributable to Jews. These include both perceived physical characteristics (such as an enlarged nose) and perceived behavioural characteristics (miserly and greedy for money and power).

The best-known anti-Semitic meme figure is the 'Happy Merchant'. This meme is based on an illustration of a Jewish man and on anti-Semitic characterisations such as a kippah, a long nose, a full beard, an evil smile and hands being rubbed, implying conspiratorial or manipulative behaviour. The meme reuses centuries-old anti-Semitic imagery. Initially this figure was posted primarily on the 4chan discussion platform.

However, in recent years Happy Merchant can be found on various social media platforms, including outside far-right forums and channels. Memes featuring the Happy Merchant are deliberately used to spread anti-Semitic ideologies and conspiracies.⁶³

Texts in anti-Semitic memes also include the triple parentheses or (((echo))) to indicate that something or someone is Jewish and images of Hitler and Nazis with texts about Jews in World War II are regularly shared in anti-Semitic memes as well. Holocaust denial or more implicit references to it are also regular features of anti-Semitic memes. In addition, some anti-Semitic memes propagate the idea that the Holocaust is part of a Jewish plot to extort money and manipulate the world. One example is a meme depicting the gate at the entrance to a concentration camp, above which the original text 'Arbeit macht frei' has been replaced with 'Make money'. In other memes the number of Holocaust victims is converted into number of dollars with the text '6 million my @\$\$. In far-right circles the term 'anti-globalism' is, in a certain context, also synonymous with anti-Semitism and on some memes a reference to 'globalism' serves as a 'dog whistle' to indicate that world politics and global economy are controlled by a small Jewish elite.⁶⁴



The 'Happy Merchant'. (Source: Knowyourmeme.com)

4.3 Islam and immigration as a cultural and ethnic problem

In the Netherlands and Western Europe the far right often claims that the themes of Islam and immigration go hand in hand⁶⁵ and it regards immigration of non-Western and Islamic asylum seekers as a cultural or ethnic problem. In their memes, far-right groups play on the fear among a section of society of the perceived threat posed by a different culture and of Islamist-inspired terrorists who may enter the country as refugees. They also try to tap into local social unrest when relatively large groups of refugees or migrants need to be (temporarily) housed in a neighbourhood or municipality on short notice. Memes relating to accommodation for refugees capitalise on concerns about the safety of a neighbourhood and of families.⁶⁶

Islamophobic and anti-migrant memes are used as a quick and effective way of painting a one-sided picture of Muslims and non-Western immigrants, for example by using memes to portray refugees or Muslims as so-called perpetrators of violence or the cause of social problems. Texts placed alongside images of refugees and Muslims in memes include 'fortune seekers', 'rapefugees not welcome', 'ISIS fighters', 'goatfuckers' and 'Wir schaffen das'.⁶⁷ They also highlight the fact that asylum seekers are mostly men with beards and raise the question of where their families are. Images of drowned refugees at sea and on the beach are portrayed in far-right memes as 'left-wing propaganda', suggesting that such images or videos are staged to play on public opinion and create support for asylum seekers to be welcomed into the country.⁶⁸



Anti-immigration and Islamophobic memes.
(Source: Knowyourmeme.com, gGAG.com)

4.4 Anti-government and anti-democracy: current government and institutions seen as an obstacle

Right-wing extremist groups and individuals have a strong aversion towards the current government, the EU, or democracy. Their aim is to implement an alternative power structure in which 'white people' are in power. Some of them also want a strong leader, who is preferably a man. Depending on which movement they belong to they would achieve this in various ways, ranging from democratic means to a race war. The memes they use claim that the government is trying to suppress the far right's ideas, ambitions and goals. Some stress that an elite group is responsible for controlling the government and the existing legal order and for keeping them in place.

Some far-right individuals and groups also align with the ideas of so-called 'sovereign citizens' who do not accept certain government rules and, in effect, create a parallel society. They advocate self-reliance based on stockpiling food supplies, items to barter with, tools, (medical) resources and even weapons. Memes also reflect the tendency to combine far-right ideas about the government with related anti-institutional conspiracies.⁶⁹

Right-wing extremist groups dispute the state's monopoly on violence and the idea that the police are allowed to use force against them in some instances. Some right-wing extremists believe they can and should take matters into their own hands. Memes may be used to advocate this either directly or more covertly. A common term that recurs in memes of this kind is 'ACAB', or the numerical variant '1312', ('All Cops Are Bastards'), a slogan that right-wing extremists have adopted from left-wing extremists.

In addition, right-wing extremist groups and individuals use memes to blame 'politics' for all kinds of social problems and to accuse politicians of not standing up for 'ordinary people'. An example is the allocation of housing or reception centres for asylum seekers. There is increasing disregard or politicisation of judges and the legal system, with some memes, for example, showing images of judges in shirts bearing the logo of the socially liberal D66 political party, or alongside texts which include references to 'double standards'. The suggestion by the far right is therefore that Muslims and the far left, for example, are judged differently (more positively) than they are.



Memes portraying the police as scumbags and the justice system as a bastion of the socially liberal and progressive political party D66.

(Source: Knowyourmeme.com and ggag.com)

Memes also regularly reflect the view that the state restricts far-right activists in terms of their freedom of expression by, for example, restricting their right to demonstrate or banning certain far-right rallies. The so-called 'mainstream media' ('MSM') is also claimed to be subservient to or under the control of the government and therefore manipulating public opinion. Far-right memes also accuse the so-called 'MSM' of spreading fake news in an attempt to align themselves with certain anti-establishment sentiments expressed elsewhere in society. Various far-right groups have built up their own online news sources and news channels to spread their own views on events. When doing so they take advantage of all possibilities on the internet, including making and spreading memes with 'own news' or disinformation.⁷⁰

**THE GOVERNMENT
IS THE VIRUS**

NOS = FAKENEWS

Memes used by the far right during the coronaviruspandemic.
(Source: Knowyourmeme.com and ggag.com)

4.5 Fighting the far left, feminism, LGBTIQ+ and woke: culture war on values

Far-right memes are also directed against political and ideological opponents, such as far-left anti-fascists, anarchists, activist feminists and the woke movement.^x Those on the far right argue, for example, that left-wing extremists are a lot more violent than they are by drawing attention to violent disruptions of peaceful far-right demonstrations by the far left. In addition to the term 'ACAB', the far right has also borrowed another text from the far left and adapted it for their own use by turning the anti-racist slogan 'Good Night White Pride' into the text 'Good Night Left Side' in memes depicting an image of a fist in the face of a far-left activist.⁷¹



Example of far-left meme (first image) hijacked by right-wing extremists (second image).
(Source: knowyourmeme.com)

Far-right memes regularly warn people that a culture clash is going on between left-progressive and right-conservative views. According to the conspiracy theory of 'cultural Marxism', far-left thinkers and activists should be suppressed - in their view - because they apparently want to overthrow traditional Western and Christian culture and push a so-called 'woke agenda'. They also claim that progressive, liberal views on gender and sex misrepresent children and encourage child pornography.⁷²



Two far-right memes warning about advocating the suppression of cultural Marxism.
(Source: Knowyourmeme.org and *The Sydney Morning Herald*)

Far-right groups also use memes to express their opposition to, and condemnation of, feminist activism, women's emancipation and the promotion of women's rights. For example, alt-right memes often feature so-called traditional women (tradwives) who fulfill the ideal conception of beauty and pits them against feminist women who do not conform to that ideal. Some on the far right and supporters from the related 'manosphere' and incel movement (see Annex 3) also promote masculinity in memes and contrast it with the perceived feminisation of society. Sexism and misogyny are also popular topics in memes, which are fuelled by the conservative idea that the ideal society is a patriarchy dominated by white alpha males in which a woman's role is limited to bearing children and caring for the family. Women in a certain prominent social or power position are regularly the target of ridicule and hatred in far-right memes.⁷³

^x 'Woke' is a term that refers to being aware of racism issues and social injustice towards minorities in society and it is used in a variety of ways. Since around 2020, the term 'woke' has increasingly evolved into a negatively charged term, as an accusation of overblown political correctness, and it has become associated with cancel culture and enforced self-censorship. It is now the subject of memes, sarcastic use and criticism.



Anti-feminist memes
(Source: ggag.com and Knowyourmeme.com)



Meme supporting LGBT, but not in the sense of 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender' (Source: ggag.com) and an example of a 'Kill The Faggot' meme.
(Source: Knowyourmeme.com)

LGBTIQ+ people are the subject of ridicule and hatred in far-right memes. Generally speaking, there is a lack of acceptance and even an active battle against issues like homosexuality and transsexuality. Sometimes the rights of LGBTIQ+ people are defended only for opportunistic reasons, for example in order to portray Muslims or Islam as intolerant. However, for the most part, LGBTIQ+ people are dismissed in memes as pernicious. The messages projected in memes are that gay men are 'not real men' and are 'effeminate' and that LGBTIQ+ people contribute to the 'Great Replacement' by having little or no 'white' offspring. The rainbow colours used by the LGBTQ+ community are misused in homophobic memes. Some American far-right memes appear to express 'support' for 'LGBT' because they incorporate the abbreviation. However, rather than representing the words lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, the letters in these memes stand for 'Liberty, Guns, Bible and Trump'. Another example are memes referring to, or stemming from, a controversial 2015 video game called 'Kill The Faggot' in which, from the shooter's perspective, points can be won for shooting LGBTIQ+ people.⁷⁴

4.6 Racial doctrine and eugenics to demonstrate white superiority

Racial discrimination and the supposed superiority of the 'white race' are popular themes in far-right memes. The alt-right and neo-Nazi movements, in particular, regularly publish controversial pseudo-scientific treatises on eugenics and racial doctrine online which are intended to demonstrate that there are differences in IQ and physical characteristics between the world's various 'human races'. This idea is also regularly highlighted in memes where the IQ of 'white' and Asian people is said to be a lot higher than the IQ of people with darker skin colours. One example is a meme in which there are two pictures of monkeys, accompanied by the text 'no difference' and the explanation that the first represents a monkey and the second a person with dark skin colour. Variants of this meme, featuring images of a gorilla and a black woman accompanied by text saying that the gorilla has an 'IQ of 85' and the woman an 'IQ of 65', are also circulating online. Another example is a meme in which a world map shows that African countries have a large number of people who are 'stupid' or 'retarded' compared to Western countries, accompanied by a text which reads 'Africans are retarded'. The rise of racist movements like 'White Lives Matter' has resulted in the topic of racism becoming more popular in memes.⁷⁵

Recognising themes helps with understanding far-right memes

To understand far-right memes it is important to recognise the themes they portray and how the different far-right movements use them, as they reflect all the major themes of the current far-right discourse. Some themes align more with one particular movement than others, as explained in more detail in Annexes 3 and 4. Each movement or grouping uses the subjects that fit its narrative (story). Racial doctrine aligns more with neo-Nazis, alt-right and accelerationists, but less with grassroots nationalists. Memes also bring the specific views and theories of a far-right movement or group on a particular topic in line with current events, becoming an easy way to arouse the interest of new audiences in their ideology. Due to the rise of self-constructed ideas and theories, as observed in the previous chapter, that individuals or groups pick and choose from the various far-right movements, it is not surprising that different themes start to blend together, or are used side by side in memes created by a particular online group. As a result it is possible that a right-wing extremist online network might publish memes calling for the preservation of the 'tradition of Black Pete' to 'protect' Dutch identity or national character, in addition to memes about racial warfare and white supremacy. However, the fact that someone outside known far-right groups shares a far-right meme does not automatically mean that the person in question is of a far-right persuasion or is a right-wing extremist. Not every supporter of the 'Black Pete' figure holds far-right views. A greater insight into far-right memes and their themes could help prevent them from being spread unintentionally.

5. Functions of far-right memes

The above has covered what far-right memes are and, where and how they are disseminated online, who uses them in far-right circles and what themes they contain. These are all things which help people recognise and understand far-right memes. This chapter identifies the functions of far-right memes as a means of communication.

Far-right memes have four functions as a means of communication

As far as far-right groups and individuals are concerned, memes are not usually created for the purpose of generating financial revenue. A common internet culture rule is that - with a few exceptions⁷⁶ - no money is paid for memes. The same applies to the far right. However, memes can be used to ask for financial support for a particular group or website. Individuals who are recruited online for their artistic skills and who are open to working for a far-right group or website usually do not receive any payment in return, but do receive recognition within the group.⁷⁷

Based on scientific literature, interviews with experts and our own analysis, far-right memes as a means of communication can be functionally classified into four categories: (1) entertaining, (2) informative, (3) recruiting and (4) extremist.⁷⁸ Incidentally, these categories are not mutually exclusive and some memes may fit into several categories. The distinction is mainly an analytical one and in practice it will sometimes be difficult to assign a meme to a specific category because it is common for elements of several categories to apply.

1. Entertaining memes: an emphasis on humour and aesthetics

Memes in the 'entertaining' category are not primarily intended to convey an underlying far-right message. These include memes which are intended to be humorous, for example to make people laugh at a racist or misogynistic joke that is socially unacceptable. This category also includes memes which, while having far-right content, are primarily used by their creator to develop and display technical skills and graphic styles. The creator's main concern here is to impress others or experience aesthetic pleasure by making cool memes, or the thrill of getting likes. In such instances the meme's underlying message is of secondary importance to the creator, who does not necessarily have to be an advocate of that message himself. Memes also exist which the creators want to use to enrich the visual language and internet culture, both pictorially and by adding new words, slogans and jargon taken from the far-right subculture.

The category of memes described here seems innocuous, is not unique to far-right memes and could, in fact, apply to all types of memes. However, it still says nothing about the effect such an 'innocent' meme can have.

2. Informative memes: for mutual daily communication

Far-right memes are also used 'informatively', for example, in mutual communication within a far-right group or website. These memes are shared to alert each other to a new far-right publication or to comment on a current event or development. In other words, the memes are created for the purpose of informing and networking within online far-right groups. Moreover, the sharers of an informative meme may be trying to create a profile for themselves within, and identify with, the group. The aim is therefore not to share information on any operational matter or express inflammatory texts that should incite others to action. Memes that do this fall into the following two categories.

3. Recruiting memes: arousing people's interest through propaganda and recruitment

The 'recruiting' category includes far-right memes that aim to convey a far-right message, arouse the interest of a new audience and provide them with access to far-right ideologies, ideas, writings and theories. This is often done in the approachable, simple, subtle and humorous way which is typical of memes. This category includes, for example, memes that contain far-right propaganda and attempt to seduce and recruit individuals so that they become supporters of the ideology of the group in question. A meme is a faster and more efficient way of reaching a young audience and introducing them to the group's way of thinking than promoting entire neo-Nazi books and lectures on far-right ideologies. In this sense a meme can be seen as an entry point that provides access to far-right thinking, ideology or a group. Memes can be a very successful means of communication when it comes to engaging people, especially young people, in a movement.⁷⁹ An important aspect of this is that individuals are not only invited to consume right-wing extremist content, but are also empowered to contribute to it actively and create their own content using memes.⁸⁰ Much of the dog-whistling in far-right memes is also aimed at interesting people in far-right thinking and fits into the 'recruiting' category.

Far-right memes that aim to attract funding by directing people to online shops, crowdfunding and other funding opportunities are also classed as recruiting memes. This category also includes memes that seek to entice individuals who already identify with a far-right network into the next, activist phase of the radicalisation process. This could include distributing leaflets or a sticker campaign, participating in a demonstration, or becoming active online for a group by personally creating memes or participating in online discussions. The focus here is on activism-related recruiting activities.

4. Extremist memes: content which glorifies and encourages extremism

The 'extremist' category includes right-wing extremist memes that are aimed at, or glorify, far-reaching radicalisation and extremism, or even terrorism. A typical characteristic of many of these memes is that their imagery and language contain partly veiled but also explicit expressions of hate or threats. These memes also regularly promote gun use and violence, venerate right-wing terrorist attacks and their perpetrators, warn people to prepare for race war, advocate violent right-wing extremist or terrorist acts and contain operational information on how to commit such acts. Dog-whistle memes which are used in specific cases to encourage or give a sign to 'a good listener' from one's own right-wing extremist network to engage in an extremist act also fall into the 'extremist' category.

Extremist memes can also be used to spread disinformation or conspiracies systematically and to wage an aggressive online culture war against so-called political correctness and liberal values of 'the left' and 'the government'. In this context scholars speak of a 'meme war'.⁸¹ This category also includes memes that deliberately and systematically designate entire population groups as scapegoats for all kinds of perceived social problems and that spread fear in other manipulative ways. As well as memes which are routinely shared in order to demonise, troll and dox political and ideological opponents, or to question, reject and undermine the authority of government, democracy and the rule of law.

6. Effects of far-right memes

Memes are part of a wide range of means of communications available to far-right groups and individuals. They are an accessible online tool that is regularly used in combination with other means of communications. Memes play an essential online part in the bigger picture of far-right propaganda, influence and radicalisation. In fact, meme usage has become an almost indispensable and effective part of online communication for the far right in recent years. At the same time, it is difficult to attribute a direct effect to the use of one specific meme or the use of memes in general. This chapter identifies the gradual effects to which meme usage by the far right contributes.

Far-right memes contribute to three indirect and gradual effects

Based on scientific literature, journalistic sources, interviews with experts and our own analysis, it can be argued that systematic meme use by the far right has an effect on: (1) the normalisation of far-right ideas; (2) group and identity formation; and (3) inspiration for extremist action. Such an effect usually takes place gradually and indirectly.

1. Normalisation and social acceptance of far-right thinking

Research shows that the repeated propagation of far-right thinking in the media and on social media causes people to become used to it and to find it normal.⁸² Society seems to have become accustomed to far-right or right-wing extremist views because such rhetoric has permeated our lives on a daily basis over the past two decades.⁸³

This gradual process of normalisation is taking place in all kinds of ways. For example, words are used in all manner of discussions on the internet and in politics and media that have their origins in far-right discourse, possibly without the users being aware of it and regularly without any critical questions being asked. The open expression and discussion of far-right ideology without being criticised contributes to social acceptance, after which there may be a shift in public opinion as to what is an acceptable way of thinking and what is not.⁸⁴

This is also something that far-right memes capitalise on. If they are systematically disseminated in public, they contribute to a shifting acceptance and normalisation of far-right terms and ideas. Some far-right groups and movements, such as the alt-right, deliberately pursue a strategy of 'metapolitics' (see box).⁸⁵ Memes are one of the ways in which they try to introduce certain previously unacceptable ideas into the public discourse.

Metapolitics

The concept of engaging in 'metapolitics' which was developed by Italian communist thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is a popular strategy among some right-wing extremists. According to Gramsci, real political power lies not with a political structure but with what he calls 'cultural hegemony', in other words the prevailing ideas that the majority of the population find acceptable. Before a political revolution can happen one must, according to Gramsci, first acquire cultural hegemony by influencing those prevailing ideas. Extreme thoughts or views can become acceptable in public opinion through the practice of 'metapolitics'.

Just like other forms of propaganda, far-right memes insidiously influence the culture of debate in mainstream discussions. As more and more people come into contact with far-right thinking through memes and accept some elements of it, a larger group of people is created who could potentially become involved in a far-right movement or online group. On the one hand the normalisation of far-right and right-wing extremist thinking is undermining democracy and the rule of law and puts pressure on inter-group relationships within society. On the other hand, the normalisation can make individuals and/or groups feel that the use of force has been legitimised. This could result in right-wing extremist violence and terrorist attacks as we have seen abroad in recent years.

2. Group and identity formation within online groups and networks

Far-right memes promote the formation and perpetuation of an online subculture. Each subculture has its own specific codes that are difficult to understand for outsiders. Individuals who recognise and appreciate far-right memes may be attracted to each other and this results in the formation of online groups, shared identity and the creation of networks.⁸⁶ This is how a distinct online subculture can come about in the form of a far-right network with which followers identify to some extent and which has been brought together by shared values, interests and group norms.

This then leads to the formation of a so-called 'in-group'. Outsiders belong to the 'out-group'. These individuals will not easily recognise or appreciate the underlying message of the memes generated by this in-group. Certain right-wing extremist memes may help outsiders to appreciate extremist content, groups and networks.⁸⁷ Right-wing extremist memes then have the effect of being an eye-opener or 'red pill'.^{XI} If an outsider is receptive to the message in right-wing extremist memes, a right-wing extremist group or online network may be interested in recruiting him or her.⁸⁸

The group formation is reinforced when the in-group starts reacting against the out-group or scapegoats such as refugees, Muslims, Jews, left-wing extremists, politicians, journalists or scientists. Far-right memes in this context are mainly used in the context of online doxing and trolling opponents. For example, a hardening of the tone in online discussions influenced by the far-right using memes can lead to online discussions being derailed or severely disrupted. Some of the critical audience (out-group) may start avoiding some online meeting places because they do not support these developments or because they are being forced away by bullying. Being constantly exposed to far-right ideas in online echo chambers can confirm the idea of like-minded people that what they think is true and that society is 'weird'. It can lead right-wing extremists to go further and further into the us-versus-them thinking, to start adopting an uncompromising harder line and to become and more radicalised.⁸⁹

In addition to the effect on group formation, memes containing far-right content can contribute to online identity formation on an individual level,⁹⁰ particularly among vulnerable young people and those who have experienced personal or social distress, have low self-confidence and few social contacts and do not feel understood either by agencies or friends and family. As they search for meaning online they may come into contact with far-right groups via memes and receive the recognition there that they do not receive in real life.⁹¹ The danger is that, outside the online world, these individuals may become even more socially isolated and may end up operating only within the subculture online where they may become radicalised.⁹²

XI The terms 'red pill' and 'blue pill' refer to a choice between a willingness to learn a potentially disturbing or life-changing truth by taking the red pill or remaining in blissful ignorance by taking the blue pill. The terms are associated with the 1999 film *The Matrix*.

3. Inspiration for extremist action

Some people within certain right-wing extremist online networks feel strongly that, sooner or later, they will have to fight for the creation of a white ethnostate, and that they will have to take action against dissenters. Right-wing extremists use memes and other online means of communication to dehumanise groups within society and ideological opponents. This in effect involves a denial that they have certain human characteristics. Ultimately this can lead to a blurring, or even the disappearance, of a psychological barrier among right-wing extremists for taking action and engaging in violence. This violence then targets specific individuals (for example politicians), members of certain population groups (such as Muslims, Jews, refugees), or certain buildings characteristic of those individuals and groups (for example reception centres, mosques and government agencies). Dehumanisation and discussions of violence take place online, primarily in private and encrypted chats and on platforms where there is little or no moderation. Individuals think they can speak freely there about their violent plans and references are made in, for example, memes and other messages to weapons and blatant calls for violence.

Extremist memes on these online channels glorify various right-wing terrorist attacks and their perpetrators, such as the attacks in Christchurch, Utøya and Oslo, El Paso, Halle and Buffalo. Some of the perpetrators are portrayed as martyrs or saints in memes. Snippets from manifestos, videos of the attacks, or games based on them also regularly appear in memes. Moreover, most of these attackers included memes in their manifestos as a justification for their attacks. Some of them also called for more memes to be shared and for the example they had set to be followed. Such calls and glorification of violence in memes may encourage other right-wing extremists and the same goes for online games inspired by these attacks. In addition, memes can also play a role in encouraging non-violent extremist actions such as hate speech, spreading fear, deliberately spreading disinformation, demonising and intimidating, rejecting laws and regulations and attempts to create a parallel society in which the authority of the Dutch government and legal system are rejected. Certainly in the longer term, actions can result in the deterioration, the undermining and a threat to the proper functioning of the democratic legal order.



The 'Feels Guy' or 'Wojak' meme character in a meme in which he prepares for an attack.

(Source: Knowyourmeme.com)

Conclusion

This analysis used (semi-)scientific literature, journalistic sources and interviews with experts to examine the role memes play for the far right in the Netherlands. In line with the use of the term in the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland, DTN), ‘far-right’ includes far-right activists as well as right-wing extremists and right-wing terrorists. All of these people act on the basis of a far-right ideology, which covers views such as xenophobia (including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim), a hatred of foreign (cultural) elements and ultra-nationalism. The key findings are presented below.

Accessible far-right message

Memes are an important online means of communication for far-right groups and individuals. A meme is defined in this analysis as an idea, expression or opinion captured in text or visual material, such as a photo, video or GIF file, mostly accompanied by text or sound, which is copied and distributed online. Memes allow the far right to get its message across in a way that is accessible and inexpensive. In doing so, they mainly reach teenagers and young people who are very active online and cannot initially be reached with complex ideological documents and theories. The simplified message in memes may still spark their interest in far-right thinking. The far-right message in memes is regularly packaged in a humorous and subtly coded way. Whether recipients recognise the message and do anything with it is ultimately up to them and the degree to which they are receptive or resilient.

Popular and resistant to moderation

The popularity and distinctive, slightly bullying and hateful tone of many far-right memes has its origins in online hate and election campaigns in the US during the period between 2014 and 2016. These days far-right memes can be found all over the internet. These memes are usually used first within individual far-right online groups, before being spread more widely via social media platforms. The more content is moderated on a platform, the more subtle the far-right message has to be expressed in the meme. Only then can a meme with a far-right message reach the larger platforms, bypass moderation and

ultimately appeal to a wider audience. Young people are lured to alternative and private online platforms where explicit right wing extremist memes and ideas are shared using humorous memes with a subtle underlying far-right message on the larger social media platforms and in game forums. Although far-right memes can be regarded as undesirable, they are difficult to moderate because the content is presented in an ambiguous or coded manner. Individuals may dismiss them as humour. Even in cases where the ambiguity and humour are far from obvious, protecting people from these memes is problematic because the intentions and effects are difficult to demonstrate. In addition, the fact that people are ignorant and see memes as harmless helps to spread far-right content outside the far-right scene in all kinds of apps.

Different meme features by movements and themes

All far-right movements in the Netherlands use memes and there are memes for every theme of the far-right discourse. To understand far-right memes it is important to recognise the themes and movements. Each movement uses specific characteristics in its memes, such as the type of humour, the degree of subtlety, the meme characters and the colours and styles. These characteristics differ based on the nature of the group, security awareness and the online environment one is in. For example, right-wing terrorists share more radical and less subtle memes in their private groups than individuals and groups operating on the larger and more accessible online platforms. The latter rely more on subtle and humorous messages in memes. Memes also vary according to far-right

theme in terms of the use of language, styles, meme figures and symbolism. Far-right memes can remain relevant and viral by establishing a link with current events. Because international memes are used in the Netherlands alongside Dutch ones, some themes or social discussions are imported from abroad, for example from the US, and adapted to the local situation. Memes acquire meaning from the historical and cultural context they are used in.

Far-right memes are also spread within other online subcultures, and vice versa. This gives far-right thinking a wider reach beyond traditional far-right groups, thereby creating a mix of topics and figures in far-right memes with influences from a variety of other related online subcultures, such as the incels. This mixing leads to a blurring of some of the boundaries between subcultures, as a result of which individuals can choose from a palette of thoughts and ideas and pick out what they think they need.⁹³ This overlap makes it more complex to place memes, their users and their thinking within traditionally far-right movements or other subcultures.

Recognising features and effects of far-right memes

Far-right memes have four functions, some of which may overlap. Recognising these functions helps us assess whether a meme is undesirable or harmful and improves our understanding of why certain memes are spread. Entertaining far-right memes seem harmless, but the message in the meme is often anything but. The informative function is mainly intended for communication within the group and to alert people to new facts or publications, rather than for operational matters. Recruiting memes contain propaganda or references to other platforms to generate interest among people, especially young people, in far-right messages and lure them towards far-right groups. Finally, there are extremist memes which promote and glorify extremist acts.

It is difficult to attach a direct consequence or effect to the use of one specific meme, or even to the specific instrument of 'memes'. However, it is clear that meme use by the far right helps to cause a number of indirect or gradual effects. These effects, namely the normalisation and social acceptance of far-right ideas, group and identity formation and inspiration for extremist action, can in turn lead to undesirable developments in society and impinge on the democratic legal order or national security.

Knowledge and resilience needed against undesirable effects of memes

The role of far-right memes cannot be dismissed as insignificant. Memes are an 'online communication weapon' of the far right that can be used in a variety of ways and have various functions and their direct effect cannot be determined in advance. Memes allow the far right to communicate elusively. The use of memes by the far right is helping to normalise far-right thinking, is contributing to (online) group and identity formation and, in a few instances, is serving as possible inspiration for violence or other extremist action. These are undesirable developments that may undermine the functioning of the democratic legal order and national security. Consequently, far-right memes matter, but their ambiguous nature makes it almost impossible to tackle them using criminal law or content management. It is essential to recognise far-right memes as such, to understand and clarify their effect and to make society more resilient to them.

Annexes

Annex 1 Definitions of key terms (as used by the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV))^{XII}

Term	Definition
Activism	Attempts by individuals or groups to influence political decision-making in extra-parliamentary ways, but within the framework of the democratic legal order.
Extremism	A willingness, for ideological reasons, to engage in non-violent and/or violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order.
Far right	Far-right thinking covers such views as xenophobia (including anti-Semitism and anti-Muslims), a hatred of foreign (cultural) elements and ultra-nationalism. While far-right activists abide by the frameworks of the democratic legal order, right-wing extremists try to undermine it and right-wing terrorists commit violence against people based on far-right views.
Far-right extremism	A willingness, for far-right motives, to engage in non-violent and/or violent activities that undermine the democratic legal order.
Right-wing terrorism	The committing, for far-right motives, of acts of violence aimed at people or the causing of socially disruptive material loss or damage, with the aim being to undermine and destabilise society, instil genuine fear in the population and/or influence political decision-making.
Radicalisation	A process of increasing willingness to accept the ultimate consequence from a way of thinking and put it into action. This increasing willingness can lead to behaviour that deeply hurts other people or affects their freedom, can cause individuals or groups to turn away from society and can lead to the use of violence. This process may take place online and offline, and often it is a combination of both.
Democratic legal order	Democratic legal order refers to a society in which interactions between government and citizens and citizens among themselves take place according to the principles, procedures and institutions which come into being as a result of constitutionally established freedoms and rights (equality rights, freedom rights and participation rights). The democratic legal order is therefore not only a political and legal system (the democratic rule of law), but also a way of living together (the open society).

XII NCTV.nl, 'Definitions used in the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands'

Annex 2 Online platforms with far-right content

Based on information from Tech Against Terrorism's Knowledge Sharing Platform and 'The online extremist ecosystem' by RAND, December 2021.

Platform type	Possibilities	Examples
Social media platforms	Far-right activists, right-wing extremists and right-wing terrorists use social media platforms to spread their message to a wide audience and interact with like-minded people and sympathisers. Overall, only a small portion of content is inappropriate or extremist/terrorist in nature.	Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), VKontakte, Instagram
Messaging applications	Far-right activists, right-wing extremists and right-wing terrorists use messaging apps as an easy, cheap and often secure means of communicating both internally and externally. Many messaging apps are secure because they use encryption (encoding).	WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, WeChat, Line, TamTam, Viber, Slack, Signal
Alt-tech or alternative platforms (also referred to as fringe platforms)	Social media platforms that present themselves as alternatives to the big mainstream platforms. They stress that they stand for freedom of expression and are against 'internet censorship'. There is little or no monitoring of posts on many of these alternative or fringe platforms, making them popular with right-wing extremists and terrorists. A mix of inappropriate or extremist and non-extreme content can be found on these platforms.	Gab, Parler, Bitchute, Minds, RocketChat
Online chat and discussion sites	<p>A <i>web forum</i> or <i>message board</i> is an online space for discussion between various users. These users post messages and can hold discussions with each other 'asynchronously'. Contributions are archived and discussions can take place over a long period of time.</p> <p>N.B. Although registration is sometimes compulsory, it is often also possible to participate anonymously.</p> <p>An <i>image board</i> is an internet forum dedicated to posting images and memes, and on which the discussions are linked to images and memes. The topics on image boards are very diverse and are divided into specific subboards (subforums). Content on image boards is very short lived and posts are not or scarcely archived. However, many posts are stored by external archive websites.</p>	<p>Daily Stormer, Stormfront</p> <p>4chan, 8kun, Frenschan</p>

Platform type	Possibilities	Examples
Online chat and discussion sites <i>N.B. Although registration is sometimes compulsory, it is often also possible to participate anonymously.</i>	<p>Chats are conducted in a <i>chat room</i> and are conversations over the internet based on two or more users of computers or phones typing and sending text back and forth to each other. Participants can also choose simply to talk to each other and/or see each other (video chat).</p> <p>A blog or <i>weblog</i> is a personal diary or report on a website that is regularly updated, sometimes several times a day. There are also video blogs, in which someone reports on something by video. The responses to a blog provide space for discussions. Bloggers can also respond to each other and engage in discussions in that way.</p>	<p>See also the information on messaging apps. Plus: Skype, Discord</p> <p>Personal blogs by far-right <i>influencers</i> (people who influence others).</p>
Video platforms or Video Sharing Platforms (VSPs)	Right-wing terrorists and extremists abuse VSPs to promote their audiovisual propaganda. Videos can be found relatively easily via search functions. VSPs frequently use algorithms to generate other suggestions of videos with similar content or themes. VSPs can often handle larger video files than on many other platforms.	YouTube, Bitchute, DLive, Vimeo, DailyMotion, Veoh, TikTok
Gaming platforms	Right-wing terrorists and extremists abuse gaming platforms to recruit and spread their message through video games. These platforms are also used for communication between users (see chats) and to prepare or livestream violent acts. Images from games or livestreams are used for memes.	Twitch, Discord, Steam, Roblox
Audio streaming platforms	Right-wing terrorists and extremists abuse audio streaming platforms to create audio messages, podcasts, music with a right-wing extremist message and to share audiobooks or audio clips from right-wing extremist books and manifestos. ^{XIII}	SoundCloud, Spotify, Apple music, BandCamp
Pasting Sites	Right-wing terrorists and extremists abuse pasting sites in order to store content such as videos, images and memes, and audio files. They are also used to collect information, such as lists of URLs (links) to take people to additional content.	Justpaste.it, DropBox, Archive.org, Top4Top, Zippyshare, Files.fm

XIII Playlists exist on Spotify, for example, with songs which the perpetrator played in his car during the Christchurch attacks, or songs about 'The Great Replacement'.

Platform type	Mogelijkheden	Voorbeelden
Right-wing extremist and terrorist websites, forums and online networks	Online meeting places which are run by right-wing extremist and right-wing terrorist organisations, or which have been set up specifically to spread right-wing extremist content and engage in right-wing extremist discussions. They play an important role in the online right-wing extremist and terrorist ecosystem, including in terms of group formation. They also serve as a starting point and repository for specific extremist or terrorist content (e.g. manifestos) that has been/will be deleted elsewhere on the internet.	Online meeting places and echo chamber for right-wing terrorists and extremists. Examples include international online networks (such as Terrorgram), websites of right-wing terrorists (The Base, Atomwaffen Division) and far-right extremist groups, and accelerationist forums (like Fascist Forge, Iron March).

N.B. Some platforms (e.g. Bitchute, Discord) fit into multiple categories.

Annex 3 Explanation of main far-right movements and the incel movement

Far-right terrorism and accelerationism

In recent years far-right terrorism and accelerationism have mainly spread from the United States over a relatively short period of time and have taken root in other western countries, including the Netherlands.⁹⁴ While not all right-wing terrorists are accelerationists, they have been a key movement within far-right terrorism for several years. Supporters of accelerationism glorify and justify terrorist violence in order to accelerate the unleashing of a race war. They are almost exclusively teenage boys and young adult men who often find themselves on private international, but also national, online platforms where accelerationist ideas are circulating – alongside other sources of inspiration such as occultism and ecofascism.^{xiv} In many cases they are struggling with psychosocial or psychopathological problems.⁹⁵ In the Netherlands there are several hundred supporters. Within the right-wing extremist spectrum in the Netherlands, the majority of terrorist threats of violence in recent years came from accelerationism.⁹⁶ Incidentally, for some the fascination with violence seems to play a more important role than the ideology of being attracted to the right-wing terrorist scene.⁹⁷

Alt-right

The ‘alternative right’ (alt-right) is an umbrella term that has been in use since around 2010 to describe a new generation of far-right individuals in the US.⁹⁸ The alt-right is also sometimes called the ‘intellectual far-right’ due to a more intellectual manifestation of its views and because, initially, a relatively large number of university graduates and students were involved. Nowadays, however, its support base has become more diverse. Although alt-right supporters are mainly active on the internet, they also engage in offline activities. The particular focus of supporters of this movement appears to be on discrediting the current rule of law and dominating the cultural debate in order to increase their support base and to make more people susceptible to their (political) agenda.

There are similarities between the alt-right movement and accelerationism and neo-Nazism. For example, the alt-right is explicitly against racial mixing, sees the ‘white race’ as superior and the movement’s aim is to create a white ethnostate.⁹⁹ The initial goal is to achieve a sufficient critical mass of people who agree with these ideas so that the change to a white ethnostate can be initiated. Within the alt-right movement violence for self-defence is justified and may be unavoidable in order to achieve the movement’s goal. Outwardly, however, its members will always claim to be non-violent. In daily life, and unlike classical neo-Nazis, supporters of this movement do not wear clearly identifiable far-right clothing or symbols, so they are not recognisable as such. A few years ago, the alt-right in the Netherlands organised some actual and hybrid¹⁰⁰ meetings with international speakers which were attended by a few hundred people. Since then no more meetings have taken place.¹⁰¹

Neo-Nazism and White Lives Matter

National Socialism, also called Nazism (prior to and during World War II) or Neo-Nazism (after World War II), assumes that the ‘white’, Germanic or Aryan race is superior to all other races. Neo-Nazis see it as their job to subjugate or destroy ‘lesser’ races. The focus is on race doctrine and on keeping a race pure. Neo-Nazi groups define the ‘own’ and the ‘foreign’ on the basis of biological-racist characteristics.¹⁰² The classical neo-Nazi organisations in the Netherlands are insignificant in size and there is almost no willingness among their members to commit violence. After the ending of the measures taken during the coronavirus crisis, Neo-Nazis started meeting more in person, in addition to online, in order to engage in social and cultural gatherings (concerts, beer drinking) or other group activities, such as physical resistance training and for sticker and poster campaigns. They sometimes also organise meetings abroad with like-minded groups, for example in Germany or Belgium. Supporters can often be clearly identified by their appearance.¹⁰³ Several new neo-Nazi groups have emerged recently. Most of their members are young people who are more active at regional level, as well as online. They tend to operate anonymously and are also more security-conscious.¹⁰⁴

XIV

Occultism focuses on that part of the supernatural world that is shrouded in darkness, with the devil or Satan playing an important role. According to ecofascism, harmony between white people and nature has been destroyed as a result of, among other things, mass immigration, globalisation and capitalism and the only solution is to stop immigration or eradicate non-white populations.

Since 2015, the racist slogan and movement 'White Lives Matter' (WLM), which started in the US in response to the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, has become more and more popular.¹⁰⁵ The movement is not exclusively neo-Nazi in nature, but contains a mix of elements from various far-right movements. Groups belonging to the WLM movement are now active in various Western countries, including in the Netherlands in recent years.¹⁰⁶ The following in the Netherlands is rather limited in terms of size, but the focus on this movement has recently become more intense after some of its members used lasers to project racist and anti-Semitic images onto buildings in Eindhoven and Rotterdam. Unlike classic neo-Nazis, WLM supporters are not always immediately recognisable by their appearance. Many within the WLM movement prefer to identify with 'pro-white activism' or 'white supremacism' (the superiority of the white race).¹⁰⁷ The aim of the WLM movement is to normalise racism and its members claim that they want to create an all-white state. They also believe that they can foster 'white-racial consciousness' by spreading racist messages proclaiming the supposed superiority of the 'white race'.¹⁰⁸

Identitarian movement

The identitarian movement is a pan-European far-right movement that believes every nation should be able to maintain its own identity. Identitarians aspire to an ideal of a homogeneous nation within their own historical territory with the ideas of 'own' and the 'foreign' being separated on the basis of culture and language (and not race as neo-Nazis would do). According to identitarians, the price that different peoples pay for coexisting is that they lose their own identity. Mass migration and Islamisation in particular, but also the 'imperialist' influence of the US on Europe are also seen as a threat to European stability and culture. The movement shows similarities with the alt-right, namely a yearning for the 'traditional values' of the Western world, such as pre-war Christian doctrine and the traditional family.¹⁰⁹

In the Netherlands the movement is fairly traditionally organised into small groups that are active both online and in the offline world and often know each other in person. In fact, the movement is quite closed to outsiders. The identitarian groups that exist in the Netherlands are quite small in size, with numbers ranging from a couple of individuals to a few dozen members. The number of people interested in the movement online appears to be slightly higher. They are known particularly for a number of small-scale activities and for occupying a number of Islamic schools and mosques some years ago.¹¹⁰ In recent years the public profile has been quite subdued.¹¹¹

The European identitarian movement uses the yellow-black lambda as its logo. The symbol was inspired by the film 300, which is about the battle of Thermopylae between Sparta and Persia (480 BC) and is intended to fuel the idea of a small group of Europeans facing the 'barbaric' tidal wave of foreign influences and people. In that sense it is similar to the crusader symbol which is widely used by other far-right groups. The Dutch identitarian movement is the only one to use a yellow-black omega as its logo. The reason given for this is that the omega, as the last letter of the Greek alphabet, marks the end of the oppressive system and is also the symbol of resistance to multiculturalism.

Ethnonationalism

Ethnonationalists believe in one people making up one nation which forms the basis of administrative unity. Ethnonationalism therefore assumes that 'the people' are more important than the state and form the basis of the state. One part of the nationalist movement in the Netherlands is the so-called 'Dutch movement' (*Dietse Beweging*), which aims to merge all Dutch-speaking areas into a 'Greater Netherlands' (also called '*Dietsland*'). Nationalist groups in the Netherlands currently play hardly any role in terms of size and willingness to use violence. Since the cancellation of the measures taken during the coronavirus crisis, nationalist and 'Dietse' groups have started meeting more in person to play sports together, go on walks in the countryside or to engage in sticker campaigns. They are also regularly in contact with related Flemish or German groups and attend each other's meetings and events.¹¹²

Incels

The so-called involuntary celibate or incel subculture is not, strictly speaking, a far-right movement and is therefore not part of this analysis. However, in terms of its themes and online language and meme use it partly overlaps with the alt-right and some neo-Nazis and accelerationists. The ‘incel’ movement is the best-known community within the so-called ‘manosphere’^{xv} and is part of a radical internet milieu characterised by public expressions of sexual frustration. Within that subculture, ideologies are not fixed but rather constructed as a fluid patchwork of individual thinking. Incels (self-proclaimed involuntary celibates) are mostly young men who believe they do not have access to sexual relations with women because they are victims of genetics, biology and society. Incels often also struggle with psychological and psychosocial problems. Their perceived inaccessibility or inability translates into misogyny and sometimes violence. Incels are not primarily driven by an ideology, but by anger, feelings of hatred and mental health problems. The movement has followers in the Netherlands but its exact size is unknown. The movement has regular contact with related Flemish or German groups and members attend each other’s meetings and events.¹¹³

XV The manosphere is a collection of communities, websites, blogs and online forums that promote masculinity, misogyny and opposition to feminism. Communities within the manosphere include incels, Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) and ‘pick-up artists’. Strictly speaking, the manosphere is not part of the far-right landscape.

Annex 4 Specific characteristics of memes per far-right movement^{XVI}

Movement	Term	Meme figures	Colour/style	Specific topics	Humour	Subtlety
Accelerationism		Black-clad, unrecognisable figures Use weapons and skulls for faces 'Saints' (right-wing terrorist perpetrators of attacks)	Red, black, white Nazi symbolism Violent	Race war, race theory, white supremacy Glorify violence and attacks Accelerationist publications, manifestos Anti-democracy, anti-government	confrontational, morbid or Absent	Explicit message
Alt-right		Hijacked cartoon characters and animations Tradwives Chad & Stacy (overlap with incels) 'Happy Merchant' Donald Trump	Green (Pepe, Kekistan) Rainbow colours (Clownworld) Symbolism (flags, swastika, KKK) Use 'dog-whistles'	White superiority, purity, cleanliness Masculinity, misogyny Anti-Semitism, Great Replacement Anti-left, anti-LGBTIQ+, anti-feminism, anti-woke Conservative Christian values	Irony, sarcasm Sometimes confrontational, morbid	Veiled or double message Sometimes explicit message
Neo-Nazism		Far-right former dictators (Hitler, Mussolini)	Red, black, white Fashwave style Symbolism (Nazi symbols, runic characters, numbers, abbreviations) Slogans	World War II Anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial Racial doctrine, white supremacy Great Replacement (White Lives Matter) Anti-democracy	Irony, sarcasm Confrontational, morbid or Absent	Explicit message Sometimes veiled

XVI This is a rough classification. In practice, there will regularly be some overlap between movements and themes. The degree of moderation on a platform, the risk awareness of a group or individual and the closed nature of a group partly determine the degree of subtlety of the message and the form of humour.

<i>Movement</i>	<i>Term</i>	Meme figures	Colour/style	Specific topics	Humour	Subtlety
		Own logos 'Black Pete' and other cultural-traditional figures	Yellow, black Use slogans and hashtags (#)	Preserve culture and 'own' traditions Anti-Islam and anti-immigration Great Replacement	Irony, sarcasm Sometimes confrontational, morbid	Both subtle and explicit message
		Historical maps of NL Historical figures (e.g. Michiel de Ruyter)	Orange Red-white-blue Prince's flag, Geuzen flag	Greater Netherlands, 'Dietzen' Golden Age/VOC Preserve NL history and people	Irony, sarcasm	Subtle message

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